

DIAMOND-DICK

BOYS BEST

JR. WEEKLY JR.

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 for year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 409.

Price, Five Cents.

DIAMOND DICK JR. AND THE HAUNTED HOUSE OR THE GHOSTS OF QUIVARO



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
"DIAMOND DICK"

Bang! Bang! Handsome Harry emptied his revolver as fast as he could pull the trigger, and Diamond Dick, Jr., and the boy acrobat came leaping on the scene.

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Diamond Dick, Jr., and the Haunted House;

OR,

The Ghosts of Quivaro.

By the author of "DIAMOND DICK."

CHAPTER I.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was as free from superstition as any man, yet the stories told him by Silas Slocum gave him a queer feeling.

Slocum had come up to the sport's room in the little hotel at Quivaro, in Arkansas.

Quivaro could not boast very much, for it was but a small place, yet it boasted a haunted house.

"If I had known about the house, of course I shouldn't have bought it," said Slocum, "but now that I've got it I don't like to be driven out of it."

"I don't blame you for that; how long have you had it? Tell me about it."

Slocum told him.

Slocum had his home in St. Louis, where he was engaged in business.

He had made many trips to this part of Arkansas, and had come to have a liking for it.

He had invested a good deal in real estate in the neighborhood of Quivaro, and had several houses in the town.

Finally he had purchased this house.

It stood on a small elevation by the river. The location was sightly. Though the house was old and needed repairs, he saw its possibilities.

No one had lived in it for several years, and it had the reputation of being haunted.

Before he purchased it people had told him queer tales about it.

They said it had been built by a river pirate many years ago. The country was very wild then, and the river pirate had been able to snap his fingers at the law. He always had a number of armed and desperate men about him.

The old river pirate was dead long ago.

But recently he had reappeared in the old house. The years had fallen from him, and he was again the

handsome young man, with the same face, which some of the very oldest people of the place remembered.

Of course this reappearance of the river pirate had not been made in the flesh; that would, naturally, be impossible. Nor had he issued forth from the house, to be seen of men in the open light of day. On the contrary, he had been seen, the few times people had beheld him, slipping into or out of the house in the half darkness of late evening or early morning, and sometimes in the pale moonlight.

Diamond Dick, Jr., laughed when he heard this.

"That is easy enough to understand," he declared.

"Oh, I know what you think about it," said Slocum. "I thought just as you do—that it was a real person, made up, perhaps, to look like the former owner of the house; but I don't think so any longer."

"You think it was this old pirate's ghost? By the way, what was his name?"

"His name was Murrill, and he was a famous river pirate. He operated not only here but on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers."

Diamond Dick, Jr., noted Slocum's earnestness.

"I've heard of Murrill. He had a hiding place—a cave or something—somewhere on the Ohio River. It's an old house, if it belonged to Murrill."

"It belonged to Murrill, so it is reported. But, to go on. Whether the thing—or the person—seen stealing in and out of the house was the ghost of Murrill, or—"

"Ha! ha! I see they've got you scared!"

Young Diamond Dick laughed.

"You don't believe in ghosts?"

"I do not."

"Well, I was sure I didn't! But—"

"Whatever they saw, it was a man—or a woman—put that down!"

"All right, we'll put that down! Say it was a man. I thought it was a man; and that this man was secretly making his home there for some purpose. It occurred to me that he was a criminal in hiding."

"Just what came to me!"

"My wife is a brave woman. I had her come up here."

"She was brave, if she came up after hearing those things!"

"Oh, she didn't know anything about it. I wanted to have her remain ignorant, and thus test the thing. If she saw and heard things—ghosts, for instance—why, then—"

He stopped.

Young Diamond Dick could see him glance round nervously.

His experiences in the haunted house had affected his nerve, or—

Before formulating the thought—that the man was a bit insane—young Diamond Dick studied him closely, without seeming to do so.

Slocum was between fifty and sixty. He was a rugged, nerveless-looking sort of man; yet there was a something in his eyes which made the sport come to the tentative conclusion that Slocum's mind was touched.

If Slocum were not just right in his mind, of course all these things he was telling might exist only in his fancy.

The sport began to wonder if the people of Quivaro had ever told such stories.

As if for the purpose of answering this, Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke Lockhart came in from the street.

"Oh, say!" cried the boy, bursting into the room, "we've been hearing some of the queerest things about that old house down by the river!"

He stopped, seeing Slocum.

Behind Luke was Handsome Harry, big hat in hand. Slocum rose.

"Come in," the sport invited, rising also and pushing out some chairs. "I'm glad to have you here just now. We'll get to hear something more about that house. Slocum, let me introduce you to my friends, Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke Lockhart."

Slocum extended his hand.

"Your'n to command," said Handsome Harry, with a scrape of his foot. "I'm han'some because I don't look et; an' I'm ther Sarpint of Siskiyou because I rattles my warnin', like an honest rattlesnake, before I bites. Happy ter met up wi' ye!"

He dropped into a chair and placed his hat on the floor.

"Mr. Slocum has been telling me about that house. He is the present owner of it; and certain things have happened which have made him nervous. He don't know whether he has bought a bargain, or—"

"Or a ghost!" Slocum finished. "If it wasn't so impossible to believe in ghosts I should know that I had bought a ghost when I purchased that house."

Lucky Luke looked at Slocum earnestly.

"So you own it? Is it true, then, that there was a murder committed there?"

"A good many of them, I'm afraid," said Slocum. "Murrill was a bloody pirate and murderer. He thought no more of taking human life than you do of taking your breakfast."

"Wow! I shouldn't wanted ter meet up wi' a gent like that!"

"He couldn't have been an interesting character to know," young Diamond Dick commented.

"I'm glad you two came in, to corroborate, in a measure, what I was saying," said Slocum; "for I could see that Mr. Wade was inclined to think I had bats in my steeple."

Bertie smiled in a quiet way.

"I thought you were perhaps losing your nerve," he admitted.

"Your looks showed that you thought worse things than that. But I want you all to listen now."

"Wow! We're willin' ter!"

"Many murders were committed in that house. I bought it without believing in spirits or ghosts, or anything of the sort. Because the house was said to be haunted I got it at a bargain—got it for a song. Nobody would live in it, and it was falling to decay. I brought my wife and daughter here from the city, and brought a number of servants. We fixed the house up to some extent, though I wasn't willing to spend much on it until I knew more. Now, remember, that none of those people—my wife and daughter and the servants—knew anything about the reputation of the house."

"Wow! Go ahead!"

Handsome Harry was becoming interested.

"We remained in that house less than a week.

"The very first night we were there we heard the most awful groans, and then a clanking of chains."

"Glee-ory to—"

"I got up, lighted a lamp, made a search, and found nothing!"

"Whoop! Nothin'?"

"Not a thing. The next night a skeleton hand came wavering out from the wall over my daughter's bed and took her by the hair. She —"

"Wow! Ye don't mean et?"

"I mean it! A skeleton hand came wavering out from the wall and felt of her hair. She was sleeping close by an open window. The moonlight came in at that window, and in the moonlight she saw that hand.

She leaped from the bed with a scream and came running into our room, frightened almost into insanity."

"The hand must have come in through the open window!" said the boy acrobat.

"I thought that possible. We searched. The window is high up from the ground and only to be reached by a ladder. There was no ladder there—nothing! There was nothing in the room—absolutely nothing!"

"Wow! Glee-ory to—"

"The next night we heard a heavy body fall with a crash on the stairway. Remember, I refused to believe in ghosts! I jumped out of bed. I had a lighted lamp there by my bed. I ran with the lamp to the stairway."

"An' nothin' there?"

"Nothing there—not a thing! The stairway was undisturbed. If a body had fallen there, or if anything had fallen, there would not have been time for it to get away or be removed. There was nothing on, or in, the stairway, and there had been nothing."

"Glee-ory to goats! You didn't stay there after that?"

"Yes, we stayed the week out. I told my wife and daughter that the whole thing was nonsense. I tried to make them think, and to make myself think, it was a case of nerves; or that some one was trying to scare us. I didn't propose to be driven out of my own house. So we stayed."

"It took courage—for the women," young Diamond Dick admitted.

"The servants wouldn't stay. After the second night they stampeded in a body. But my wife and daughter stayed. I armed myself, and we kept lights burning in all the rooms. For two whole nights I am sure I didn't close my eyes for a single minute."

"An' yit you seen things?"

"No, I only heard them. The only time when anything was seen was when the skeleton hand came out over my daughter's head. But we heard things continually. We would hear that bumping and thumping on the stairs. When I would go to the stairs there would be nothing there."

"We heard groans; we heard chains rattling; we heard screams and calls for help, and then more thumpings, as if some one was being murdered. Sometimes the whole house would be given a sudden jar."

"We stuck it out a week, and then we left. My wife was a wreck, from sheer fright and nervousness, and so was my daughter. I wasn't much better, I confess.

Gentlemen, I wouldn't go through that week again for all the houses in this town. I mean just what I say."

"Have you ever been there since?" young Diamond Dick asked.

"Yes."

"Tell me about that."

"I have been there several times, in daylight, and could discover nothing; and I tried to spend one night there. I had a friend with me. He declared that he wasn't afraid, and he wanted to stay there with me one night. I stayed till two o'clock in the morning. It was enough for me; I left, and I wasn't more than out of the house till he followed."

"Have you any theory?" the sport inquired.

"I have had dozens, but I have dropped all theories."

"Then you think the house is really haunted?"

"I don't know what to think; I'm at the end of my row. That's why I came to you."

"Ghost hunting isn't just in my line."

"I thought I might be able to make it worth your while—if you should succeed in lifting the mystery. I'm willing to pay big for that. You can see for yourself that it is a valuable piece of property, if that cloud could be removed from it. As it is, it is worthless—absolutely worthless."

"What do the people of the town think about it?"

"Oh, they believe that the house is haunted, of course."

"Do the more intelligent of them think that?"

"Well, Brennan, the lawyer, is as intelligent as any man in the place, I suppose. He doesn't believe in ghosts, but he acknowledges that he can't explain it."

"He hasn't any explanation to offer?"

"I think not. He simply says that the thing is beyond him and he can't understand it."

Young Diamond Dick looked at his friends.

"How do you think you'd like a job like that—sifting the mystery of a haunted house?"

"Wow! I don't want et!"

"You aren't afraid?"

"Ther Sarpint of Siskiyou ain't ter say afraid—not of anything thet's human, or understandable; but he draws ther line on ghost huntin'. Ther pizen teeth o' the Sarpint wouldn't take holt of a ghost, I reckon!"

Handsome Harry smiled, affecting to treat the subject lightly; but he was in earnest, just the same.

"I think it would be interesting," said the boy acrobat.

"To make the experiment?"

"Yes."

"I'll pay you well for it, if you succeed in discovering anything," Slocum promised, eagerly.

The sport looked at Slocum.

"I suppose you aren't afraid to stay with us there?"

"To-night?"

"We might as well begin on the thing at once, as my time is valuable."

"Then you'll undertake it?"

Slocum's face lighted.

"We'll stay there one night; and after that we'll talk over the matter—over the details, and of what you're to pay."

"I don't pay anything, if you don't succeed!"

"I understand that. Will you stay one night with us? You're familiar with the place; with the location of that stairway and the different rooms."

Slocum hesitated, nervously.

"Well, I oughtn't to be afraid, so long as you fellows are to be with me."

"You'll go with us, then?"

"Yes."

But he answered with reluctance.

"All right, then; we'll try it for one night."

CHAPTER II.

A SINGULAR DISAPPEARANCE.

Having come to this decision the sport was ready to proceed.

Slocum's marvelous story had stirred his curiosity.

He was sure that there was nothing supernatural in the things which had been heard and seen.

"I'll tell you my opinion of the thing," he said, as he went from his room to the street with Slocum and his friends. "Some one has a reason for not wanting you to get hold of that property."

"Why me?" Slocum asked. "This thing was going on before I ever heard of the house."

"Some party wants to get the house for himself, and he wants to get it for about nothing. So he has planned to make these noises and get up such a scare that no one will live there. By and by, with the property depreciating in value, the owner will be willing to sell it for almost nothing. Then this party expects to buy it. When he has bought it the ghost business will stop."

"That looks reasonable," assented Lucky Luke.

"Luke, you're ter be ther mascot o' this business,"

said the giant. "Mascots and rabbits' feet an' other witch truck o' thet kind is goin' ter be needed by us a heap 'fore we git through with this thing, in my opinion."

The night had fallen, and there was no moon.

"The moon will rise about midnight," said young Diamond Dick.

"Jist ther time for thet ghost to commence his antics."

"Yes, 'the hour when graveyards yawn,'" said the sport, lightly. "Does this ghost always keep his midnight appointment?"

"Sometimes he doesn't come until nearly morning," said Slocum.

"But he always comes?"

"The sounds were heard every night I was there." They were in the street now, hurrying along.

Quivaro, as has been said, was but a small place.

The one narrow street was dimly lighted by the store lamps and by a few kerosene lamps set on posts.

When the town was left behind the darkness was intense.

"How far is it to this house?" the sport inquired.

"Nearly a mile from the town, on a bluff right by the river. The house overhangs the river. There used to be a boat landing, in the days of Murrill, I'm told. It's said that he drew his boats up there and unloaded the proceeds of his robberies into the cellar."

"Then there is a cellar?"

"Yes, I said there was; it opens right out by the river, with a door on the riverside."

"Your ghost must get into the house through that cellar. We'll bear that in mind."

A brisk walk of twenty minutes from the town brought them in sight of a dark mass that loomed before them like a low hill.

This was the haunted house.

Lucky Luke took out his collapsible torch and struck a light with it, lifting the flickering torch over his head.

Young Diamond Dick laughed at this.

"You want to see his ghostship, if he's here!"

"I want to see where I'm going!" said the boy acrobat, stoutly.

"Glee-ory to sarpints, me too! I've walked inter noore traps than one by not bein' able to see what I war oin'. Hold up yer light, son, an' ef that's ary ghost und we'll mebbe shine his eyes."

"And then?"

"Why, then, I'll shoot his hide so full o' holes that he'll stop his monkeyin'."

But they saw nothing.

The light of the torch illuminated in a faint way the front of the house.

Taking the torch himself the sport, followed by the others, circled the house, finding it dark all around.

They inspected the door leading from the cellar to what had once been the boat landing.

The piling and the landing had vanished utterly.

The cellar walls looked undisturbed, and were green from moisture and neglect.

"You didn't clean up very well back here," the sport observed to Slocum.

"No, I spent most of my work on the interior of the house. You see, until I determined whether I could live in the place permanently or not I thought it was not worth while to spend a great deal of money. It seemed too much like throwing it away."

There seemed to be something of a contradiction between this and Slocum's first statement of the repairing he had done.

The sport noted it, and wondered about it.

He was still studying Slocum.

From certain looks he had caught he was at times half inclined to think that Slocum had himself played the ghost.

Yet, putting everything together, the idea seemed untenable, and even preposterous.

"We'll go in and see what's to be discovered on the inside," he said, when they had made a circuit of the house.

Having reached the front door, Slocum took a big key from his pocket and applied it to the lock.

It squeaked rustily in the wards of the lock and the door yielded grudgingly.

"I don't think Slocum laid out enough on repairs to hurt him," was the thought of the sport.

The steps at the front of the house were decayed and rickety.

And when they had entered they beheld many evidences of decay.

Yet there had been some attempts made to brighten up the interior. Whitewash had been applied to the plastering of most of the rooms, thus brightening them; and where a stair railing had been broken it had been repaired.

Diamond Dick held up the torch to illumine the wide

hall, until Slocum had produced and lighted some kerosene lamps.

Some cheap furniture, brought up the river, or purchased in Quivaro, had been placed in the rooms.

Slocum explained everything, as they moved from room to room.

"This is the room in which my daughter slept," he said, stopping in an upper room which overlooked the river.

Diamond Dick, Jr., scanned it keenly.

It was an ordinary bedroom, furnished very cheaply.

The walls had been whitened, but the room did not look prepossessing, though an attempt had been made to brighten it up. Some withered flowers were in a vase on the little table. The bed looked tumbled and rumpled.

"You see, my daughter fled from the room in fright, and would never come back to it to straighten up the bed, and the servants had already gone," Slocum explained.

Young Diamond Dick walked over to the one window.

"And this is the window through which that skeleton hand came?" he said, as he proceeded to hoist the sash.

"Yes."

The sport turned on him, before looking out of the window.

"I thought you said, Mr. Slocum, that you did not know where the skeleton hand came from?"

"I do not know where it came from. I thought, though, as you do, that it must have come through that window. The window was open, as I believe I told you."

The sport put his head through the open window.

Utter darkness reigned without, accentuated by the light in the room.

Below sounded the gurgle of the river as it slipped between its wooded banks.

Not far distant an oak tree thrust up its wide branches.

Young Diamond Dick looked at those branches as the light from the room played over them.

"Some one might have manipulated that skeleton hand from the oak," was his thought.

"There was no ladder here, nor any sign that one had been here?" he said, addressing Slocum.

"Nothing."

He closed the window.

"We've been all over the house?"

"Except into the cellar and into the attic."

"We'll take a look at those places."

Slocum led the way again, our friends following.

Lucky Luke could hear the heavy breathing of Handsome Harry, as he followed solemnly, stamping heavily at their heels.

"Wow! This hyer biz o' ghost huntin' ain't jist accordin' ter my idees o' Hoyle!" the boy heard him mutter. "But ef Bertie goes inter et, why, I gotter go inter et, too, ter see that he ain't done up in no way. I never believed in ghosts, so I calc'late that must be some kind of a hocus-pocus bizness hyer. Yit et ain't fer me ter say that ain't no sich things as ghosts, jist because I never seen one. Thar's a heap er things in this world that people don't see that's strange an' sing'lar. Fer instance, you don't see electricity, yit you're plum shore that is sich a thing."

Thus the giant muttered, as the search of the house was continued.

He did not like the work which it seemed Bertie was about to undertake, yet he was far too loyal to refuse to stand by him in it.

And he had the utmost faith in young Diamond Dick's wisdom and judgment; only it did look to him too much like tempting fate to go into a thing like this.

Having examined the cellar and the attic, the whole party returned to the sitting room.

Here were some comfortable chairs, a carpet on the floor, a table and a lounge. Altogether, a night watch could be spent there very comfortably.

With the lamp burning brightly on the table, Diamond Dick, Jr., and those with him talked over the situation.

The sport was anxious to have Slocum talk, that he might study him to better advantage.

Slocum's eyes were big and bright, and he was apparently much excited. The memories of the experiences through which he had passed in that house, and their effect on him and his family, would account for his wild-eyed excitement.

"I don't know whether the man is wholly sane or not," was the conclusion of the sport. "But, whether he is or not, there seems to be no doubt that the people of the town believe as much as he does that this house is haunted. Who is haunting it, and what for? Those are questions we ought to be able to solve."

Slocum became more and more nervous as midnight approached.

Time and again he took out his watch to consult it. He shifted uneasily in his chair.

Now and then in the middle of a sentence he stopped suddenly as if to listen.

"Will the moon rise at midnight?" he asked.

"According to the almanac, yes; but there is some fog, and the light which it will give may be poor enough."

"You'll keep the lamp burning?"

"Not if you think it will scare away the ghost!"

"Oh, it won't scare it away!" Slocum protested nervously.

He was taking out his watch every minute.

"Two minutes of twelve!" he said, at last, and said it with a shiver, glancing nervously about.

"Wow! Stayin' hyer with that critter is enough ter make a feller see ghosts!" was the thought of Handsome Harry.

Lucky Luke was listening, close by the window.

Outside he heard the murmur of the river and the sooughing of the wind in the trees. From a nearby swamp frogs croaked.

The east was beginning to lighten, for already the moon was up, though its light was not yet appreciable.

As they thus sat listening, all were brought to their feet by a heavy fall, as if some one had tumbled down the stairway.

This was followed by a hollow groan.

Handsome Harry's hand went to his pistol.

Slocum's face whitened to a chalky look.

Even Diamond Dick, Jr., was noticeably astonished.

Snatching up the torch, he ignited it by striking the spring with his fingers, and leaping into the corridor, he dashed toward the stairway.

Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke followed.

Slocum remained trembling in his chair.

The sport, before leaping toward the stairway, saw that the man seemed terribly frightened and almost hysterically nervous.

"The fellow is honest, anyway," was his thought. "He doesn't know what made that noise any more than I do!"

When young Diamond Dick reached the stairway and flashed on it the light of the torch he saw nothing. The stairway apparently was just as when he had seen it earlier in the night.

"Glee-ory to all squirmin' reptiles!" Handsome Harry bellowed. "What do ye think of et?"

Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, answer was to begin a search over the stairway, which he extended into the room above.

"Hyer, don't git in too big a hurry!" Handsome Harry called, as they advanced. "I wanter keep clost to that light, now I tell ye! Thet ghost may take a notion ter do things ter me!"

He tried to laugh, but he was not in a laughing mood, as his words showed.

"Nothing here," said the sport, much mystified.

He was on the stairway again, descending, when he heard a wild scream, in the voice of Slocum.

Again Slocum screamed, as if in fear or agony.

A scuffling sound was heard, a rattling as of the window, and then a banging noise like the shutting of a heavy door.

Young Diamond Dick went down the stairway three steps at a time, with his companions almost falling down it as they followed him.

A few quick steps took him to the room where Slocum had been left.

The door stood ajar, as when last seen, and the lamp burned on the table.

But Slocum was gone!

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERY.

Lucky Luke could hardly believe his eyes, when he saw that the room in which they had left Slocum was empty and that Slocum was gone.

In the boy's ears still rang that wild scream and the sounds that accompanied and followed it.

He stared at the window.

It was closed.

"Glee-ory to all squirmin' reptiles!" Handsome Harry exclaimed. "Whar is ther critter at?"

Diamond Dick, Jr., rushed to the window and tried it.

It was fastened, just as he had himself left it.

Clearly, it did not seem that Slocum had passed through that window.

Dashing back to the door, carrying the torch, the sport started along the corridor.

The corridor made an elbow bend after a short dis-

tance, and ended where a window opened on a rotting piazza and a door opened into a bedroom.

The hall here was paneled in heavy oak.

The sport tried the door and found it locked.

He tried the window, and that, too, was fastened.

Undoing the window fastening and lifting the sash, he looked out on the piazza, letting the light flash over the moldering roof.

"Climb out there, Luke!" he commanded.

Fishing a bit of candle from his pocket, he gave the torch to the boy and helped him to the roof.

The candle end he lighted himself, and held it up to dissipate the darkness of the corridor.

"Go back to the room where the lamp is burning," he said to Handsome Harry. "Perhaps something else will happen. Slocum didn't get out of this house, unless he went out by this window and this piazza."

"What do ye think?"

"I'm not thinking anything. Go back to the room."

"By all the angular, triangular crawlers, this hyer puts me up a stump an' freezes the hair in my veins! Et do!"

The giant hesitated, but hearing Lucky Luke clattering about on the roof of the piazza, he felt that he could be as brave as the boy acrobat; and he went back to the room where the lamp burned, finding everything just as when he had last seen it.

"Wough-h-h!" he grunted, glaring about.

He had drawn his revolver and held it ready.

"Wow! Wake up sarpints and shine yer scales! Hyer is a mysterious thing, er I'm dreamin'! I reckon ther ghost got Slocum that time! An' et may be layin' fer me some'eres! Waal, ef et comes fer me I'll shore turn my gun loose on et, sperit er no sperit. I don't take any chances!"

But he saw nothing, heard nothing.

In a little while he heard Diamond Dick, Jr., and Lucky Luke returning along the corridor.

He could tell that they were disturbed and puzzled.

"What do ye think of et?" he bellowed, as young Diamond Dick appeared.

"I think Slocum was carried away, or ran away!"

"Whoop! Run away?"

"I don't say that he did."

"What would he wanter—"

"We'll make a further search," said the sport.

He held Lucky Luke's torch.

Handsome Harry followed him again.

Moving along the corridor, the sport sounded the walls with the butt of his revolver.

"They sound holler!"

"Yes, of course, for there is no backing but the plastering and the partition. What I'm hunting for is a door."

"Do ye think thar is a door?"

"I don't think."

"Stopped thinkin', hey?"

"Until I get something to pin an opinion to there's no use of trying to form one."

"You said mebbe somebody carried Slocum away?"

"Yes."

"Who could 'a' done et?"

"I don't know."

"How could he 'a' done et?"

"I don't know."

"I been thinkin' about et; and nobody could 'a' done a thing like that, unless et war a ghost. Ther window was shet tight, and thar ain't any door leadin' out o' the house on this floor."

"I'm trying to see if there isn't a door."

"Ef Slocum skipped out himself, why did he wanter go that way, an' what made him yell so? He war skeered, I tell ye! I can tell when a man is skeered, ef I hear him yell. He war skeered about ter death. Seemed like somethin' grabbed him; and that skeered him so that he begun ter yell; an' then thar was a struggle, and he war dragged away. You heerd a door bang?"

"Yes; I'm looking for that door."

"Waal, ef a door banged, as Slocum was tuck through et, wouldn't et be in thet room, instid o' hyer?"

"You must remember that we were not in this corridor when we heard those sounds."

"No, we war a good distance away."

"Just so; and sounds in a house like this would be deceiving. Slocum may not have been in that room at all when he was attacked, if he was attacked."

"Ef he war attacked?"

"I'm going on the supposition now that he was attacked. So, I say, he may not have been in that room when he was attacked. He may have started to follow us. He was badly scared when we left him there, or he seemed to be. He might have felt too nervous to remain there alone, and so have started to follow us. He may have gone toward the end of the corridor, instead of in our direction. Then, if attacked, some one jumped on him and dragged him away."

"Wow! this makes my whiskers git stiff as ther quills of a porkerpine! I'm expectin' some kind of a fiery-eyed critter to jump out'n these hyer walls an' grab me. Woo-ee! Say, I'm willin' ter throw up this job right hyer an' now!"

"And let Slocum go?"

"You said mebbe he skipped out of hisself!"

"And maybe he didn't. If he didn't he needs help, and I'm going to help him."

Young Diamond Dick thumped with the revolver butt along the walls to the farthest end of the corridor.

The panels engrossed his attention most; yet he could find no keyholes nor anything to indicate that doors were hid there.

While thus engaged they were again startled.

First they heard a chain clank somewhere.

The sport stood up, holding aloft the torch.

Handsome Harry lifted his shaggy head and threw out his revolver.

Lucky Luke stiffened like a ramrod.

"Wow! What war thet?"

A thump that seemed to shake the house followed; then there came a low scream that sounded weird and strange, and seemed to die away outside somewhere.

"Glee-ory to goats, I'm goin' ter git out er this!"

"Stop!"

The hand of the sport fell on the giant's shoulder.

"That was a human voice."

"Twarn't Slocum!"

"It may have been."

"I know et warn't. Thet sounded like a woman!"

"Why would Slocum do such a thing?" asked Lucky Luke.

"Son, thet's et! Why would he?"

"I'll tell you when I find out!" was Diamond Dick, Jr.'s, rather sarcastic reply. "At present I don't know myself."

They stood together in the corridor listening.

"Ther thing has gone. Seemed ter me et drifted up ther river, er down ther river."

"It sounded as if it were outside of the house."

"Somebody could have jolted against the house with a piece of timber and made that jarring noise, and then he could have wailed in that way," said the sport.

"But ther chain—ther clankin' chain?"

"It would have been just as easy for him to rattle a chain as to do the other things."

When no further sound came they moved in the direction of the stairway.

The clanking of the chain had seemed to come from that direction, though on this point they were not clear.

But the stairway was found utterly deserted.

The garret was empty, as before.

In the sitting room the lamp burned undisturbed on the table.

Having reached the sitting room again, after a round of the house, Handsome Harry sank with shaking limbs into the nearest chair.

"By all ther great snakes, mebbe you fellers finds this hyer funny, but I don't! I moves we give et up. I'm beginnin' ter believe in ghosts, I am; and I allus said that a man that believed in ghosts had somethin' ther matter with his top piece—that he war shore a candidate fer an insane asylum. I don't wanter feel that I'm li'ble ter be sich a candidate."

Handsome Harry was in earnest.

All the superstition lying dormant in his nature was being aroused.

Diamond Dick, Jr., strong-minded and self-reliant as he was, felt a queer thrill himself.

So did the boy acrobat, though he tried to conceal it. And he kept telling himself that there was nothing supernatural about any of these things, and that the explanation must be exceedingly simple.

For some time Diamond Dick, Jr., and his companions waited in that sitting room for a repetition of the mysterious sounds.

The minutes dragged slowly along.

At times the sport almost held his breath, as he listened.

Not a thing was heard except their own breathing, and the wind, and the gurgle of the river.

"Wow!" exclaimed Handsome Harry, breaking the deathly silence at last. "I shore would like ter know about Slocum."

"Yes, I feel almost criminal sitting here, when he may be in need of help!"

"But what kin we do?"

"Nothing. We don't know what has become of him."

"Ner whether he went hisself, or war dragged away by ther——"

He hesitated to say ghost, yet did not know what other word to use.

"Whatever happened to him there was nothing supernatural about it. It was the work of a man or men."

"How do ye know et?"

"Common sense tells me that."

"But in a case like this hyer common sense fails ter git in her work."

"Yes, it can be said that generally in a case like this common sense fails to work, and that is why people become foolish about it: When common sense goes out, superstition comes in to take its place."

"Glee-ory to all sarpints, my common sense must be evaporatin' fast, fer I'm shore beginnin' ter think that war the work of a ghost!"

The minutes and the hours crept by.

At intervals Diamond Dick, Jr., and his companions made the rounds of the house, moving softly.

They were troubled about Slocum.

Yet they did not know what to do.

They began to think that if the thing were not of his own doing he had been murdered.

It was an unpleasant thought, sufficient to give one a creepy feeling.

But if murdered, it was the work of a man, the sport pointed out; for there was no reason to think that a ghost would commit murder.

The house lay in utter quiet until morning.

Just at the break of day Lucky Luke, who chanced to be near the window, fancied he heard the dip and splash of an oar blade.

He had the window up in an instant and was hanging out of it, listening.

A gray mist hung over the face of the river, so that he could not see the water.

If a boat as large as a small house had been down there he could not have seen it.

He listened intently, putting up his hand to keep his companions from interrupting with questions.

The sound did not reach him again.

Withdrawing his head, he told of what he thought he had heard.

"It must have been just a fancy, or else a broken bough fell from one of the trees into the water. That would have made a light splash. Or it might have been the jumping of a fish."

Diamond Dick, Jr., stepped to the window, which was now open, and looked out.

But he could see nothing, and he heard nothing.

Daylight had come, but the morning was foggy.

"No more ghost business ter-night," said the giant, with a sigh. "Ghosts don't cut up their capers in the day time. I'm glad o' that, I tell ye! Say, is my whiskers turned white?"

Lucky Luke tried to laugh.

"No, but your eyes look rather big and bright."

"Son, they been poppin' out o' my head half the night! I wonder they ain't hangin' out on my cheeks. Sich another night I never went through, so help me Joseph! An' sich another night I never wanter see."

"We'll take a look now round the house," said the sport, drawing in his head and closing and securing the window."

They left the room together, and went outside into the gray dawn.

They circled the house carefully, looking for tracks.

They saw tracks, but they were tracks they had made themselves, when they had accompanied Slocum to the rear cellar door.

And now Slocum was gone!

"Thar's his tracks, I do believe!" cried the giant, pointing to the imprint of boot heels near the door.

"Yes, I think those are the marks left by Slocum's boots," the sport agreed.

There was no indication that a boat had been on the bank or had been pushed out into the river.

Returning to the front entrance, with the light of day noticeably increasing, they again went into the house.

They now made a thorough search of the house from cellar to garret.

It was utterly vacant.

"Wough-h-h!" the giant grumbled. "I says that we better give this thing up. Ef we try et another night one of us will turn up missin'. Ef one o' us goes each night, three nights more will clean us out. Then what?"

"We'll be gone!" said the sport, grimly.

"Ye ain't goin' ter try et?"

"I think I shall."

"But ye tol' Slocum you would try et fer one night fu'st an'—"

"And now I see that I must go further. I can't stop now. I must find out what happened to Slocum."

"Glee-ory to all snakes, but you're a most ferocious kind o' critter!"

Because he was what Handsome Harry called "ferocious"—that is, determined—was one of the principal reasons why young Diamond Dick was so successful in his many desperate and dangerous undertakings.

CHAPTER IV.

LAWYER BRENNAN.

When daylight had come fully Diamond Dick, Jr., and his friends returned to Quivaro, walking slowly and thoughtfully back along the road they had traversed with Slocum in the night.

The fact that Slocum was not with them gave them much food for reflection.

His disappearance was bound up in a seemingly impenetrable mystery.

"The first thing we do is to get a good breakfast, and after that we'll get some sleep. We need it!"

Thus spoke young Diamond Dick.

"I don't feel as ef I could eat cooked vittles any more than I could eat hay," was the giant's remark. "Thet bizness last night sort o' took my appetite."

Diamond Dick, Jr., smiled.

"You need a drink, I guess, to get your nerve back."

"Wow! I do!"

At the bar Handsome Harry tried to elevate his spirits by pouring spirits down.

The effect was good.

He came out of the barroom smiling.

"Them's ther only kind of sperits I'm believin' in!" he declared.

Young Diamond Dick plucked him by the coat and drew him away.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Harry; but we don't want to talk about this business before strangers."

"Wow! Why not?"

"It may not be wise."

"How?"

"You're stupid to-day. But perhaps that's because of the loss of sleep and the excitement. All the things that were done at that house last night, were done by a man or men. Remember that! Now, doesn't it seem to you that perhaps those men, or that man, can be expected to be listening for what we report?"

"Thar's shore truth in that."

"Therefore, we won't say anything, and he won't hear anything."

"We'll disapp'nt him!"

"Exactly. We'll say nothing to anyone."

"Wow! I'm agreeable. And now I'm ready fer the fodder, ef the fodder is ready fer me."

Breakfast was ready, and Handsome Harry was ready to do it full justice.

After breakfast young Diamond Dick went out on the street.

He was not sleepy.

For a while he walked about, engaged in thought.

All the events of the night he passed in review.

He was as much mystified, when he had done so, as at any time.

"Whether it's safe or not, I'll try it! I'll take the risk!"

He had thought of Brennan, the lawyer spoken of by Slocum, as being about the only man in Quivaro who was strong-minded enough not to believe in the haunted house.

Slocum had spoken of Brennan as a man of clear head; yet had said that even Brennan did not know what to make of the stories told of the haunted house.

"I can find out what Brennan thinks of Slocum; and maybe he can tell me something which will enable me to guess better whether Slocum was carried away last night, or whether he decamped, or ran away in a crazy fit."

Though the hour was so early the sport found Brennan in his office.

It was up one flight, in a dingy building.

Brennan was alone when the sport entered.

Bertie took out and extended his card.

Brennan glanced at it, and then bent on the sport a keen look.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "I've heard of you. You've been in Arkansas for some weeks."

Brennan was a smooth-faced, placid-looking man, of forty-five or fifty; not a man to be stirred to much excitement by anything. He had an indolent air, as he leaned back now in his easy, office chair and puffed at his morning cigar.

"I have come to you for some information, which I believe you can give me better than any man in the town," said the sport, as he took a seat, after closing the door cautiously behind him.

Brennan noted that the sport closed the door.

"Private, eh?"

"Yes; about the haunted house."

Brennan sat up straighter.

"Slocum's been talking to you about that, eh?"

"He desired to employ me to ferret out the mystery for him. Do you know Slocum pretty well?"

"Fairly well, though I'm not intimately acquainted with him. He lives in St. Louis, I believe; and he bought that old rookery because he found it a bargain, or thought it a bargain. There's a good deal of valuable timber land goes with it."

"What do you think of the stories told about it?"

"Rot, of course."

"Have you any theories about them?"

"No, I can't say that I have. In fact, I've paid very little attention to the matter. Ignorant people will always tell marvelous things about any old house that gets the reputation of being haunted. Some of the things that have happened there I think were merely practical jokes."

"How is that?"

"Well, when Slocum took his family there, for instance. One night he heard the house jar and shake. Then he heard a sound like a heavy blow. He heard groans and screams. Now, in my opinion, some of the boys of the town did all those things. They knew Slocum was going up there, and they tried to scare him. Anyone outside could jar the house by striking it with a heavy beam, or by throwing something against it; and that would account, too, for the blows. A woman was heard to scream, I believe. Some boys can scream just like a woman; and boys, hid outside in the darkness, made those noises, in my opinion."

"You said as much to Slocum, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"What did he think?"

"Well, he wasn't willing to accept my theory. His daughter had seen a skeleton hand, and other things had been seen."

"How do you account for those things?"

"Just an excited imagination, in my opinion. The girl had been asleep, and no doubt she dreamed of the skeleton hand. Or, waking suddenly from a dream, she thought she saw it; but it was merely the recollection of the dream projected into her waking moments."

He settled back in his chair and resumed his cigar.

"Slocum believed his daughter's story, I think?" said the sport.

"Well, yes, I suppose he did. But Slocum is a queer dog himself."

This was what young Diamond Dick wanted to get at—Slocum's mental peculiarities.

"In what way, may I ask?"

"There is something back of your questions," said Brennan. "I can see that."

"There is; and what it is I'll tell you in a minute. Tell me about Slocum. Was he all right mentally?"

"Was he? You mean is he?"

"Yes; is he all right mentally?"

"Well, now, I don't know. I'm not an expert in such matters. But the very fact that Slocum took such stock in the stories of the haunted house, and the fact that he was so badly scared, made me think him rather peculiar, to say the least."

"You didn't think him unbalanced—insane?"

"I thought he might be at times, but not all the time."

"Now, I've got another question; and then I'll tell you my story. Would there be any reason why Slocum should want to play the ghost business himself?"

Brennan opened his eyes very wide. Apparently this was a new idea to him.

"Say," he cried, "I never thought of that!"

He sat for a moment, pondering.

"No, there isn't any reason why Slocum should want to play ghost, now. Before he bought the property he might have thought that by playing ghost and increasing the bad reputation of the house he could purchase it for less money; but there would be no reason for him to play ghost there, after he had bought the property."

"Thank you," said the sport. "Now I will tell my story."

Then he narrated all the facts that are known to the reader.

Brennan seemed thunderstruck.

"I can't understand that!" he admitted. "I don't think, though, that Slocum would run away in that manner, just to put up a game on you; he was carried away, and perhaps murdered!"

"Who would want to murder him? Has he any enemies?"

These were questions Brennan could not answer.

They were questions to whose solution the sport now set himself.

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST WALKS.

There was a constable and a justice of the peace in Quivaro.

Young Diamond Dick decided that it would be best not to say anything to these men at present.

Before departing from Brennan's office he requested him to keep to himself for a time the story he had heard.

Having done all that he could, the sport retired to his room at the hotel, and sought rest and forgetful-

ness in sleep; and it was characteristic of the man that he was able to sleep well and soundly, even with such a burden on his mind, and after such a startling and singular experience.

That afternoon, with Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke, he made a quiet search in and about Quivaro for some traces of Slocum.

The banks of the river near the haunted house were examined, and the grounds surrounding the house.

The house itself was gone through carefully, not in the expectation of finding Slocum, but in the hope of discovering the manner of his exit from the place.

But whether Slocum was attacked in the room or in the corridor, or whether he was attacked at all, were matters they could not determine.

The patent thing was that Slocum was gone.

Beyond that, all was buried in mystery.

Handsome Harry entered with as much interest and enthusiasm into his work as did Lucky Luke.

He was almost able to laugh at his superstitions of the night.

Daylight is a great dissipator of foolish fancies.

He believed now that whatever had happened human agency was back of it.

In his extensive experience as a helper and companion of the Diamond Dicks he had encountered many mysteries and dispelled the most of them.

This seemed no more impenetrable than many others.

But when black darkness came again, and the watch was set once more in the haunted house, the giant confessed that he did not feel so confident and sure as in the broad, open light of the day.

The wind seemed to moan through the trees with a different sound, the gurgle of the river hinted of solitude and mystery, the croaking of the frogs was mournful.

Nevertheless, Handsome Harry pulled his courage together, and proceeded at intervals to "keep his spirits up by pouring spirits down."

Midnight came and went and nothing occurred.

The hours dragged on toward morning.

To facilitate discovery in case of an invasion of the house by way of any one of the windows, young Diamond Dick divided his little force.

In this division, Handsome Harry was given a position in the paneled corridor, not far from the window at the corridor's end.

He tipped his chair against the corridor wall, pushed

back his hat, laid his revolver across his knee, and imbibed some more "Dutch courage."

"Wow!" he grunted. "I reckon one o' ther reasons why good, red likker war made war jist to help a feller out in times like this, when he needs nerve. My nerve is all right ter-night, you bet! an' ef any fool ghost goes ter prancin' round hyer, why, et will wish et had remained out o' ther ghost bizness! Wough-h-h!"

At intervals he looked around. At other times he seemed to sleep.

"Wow! Lucky Luke says that when ther ghost walks is ther time ye git yer money! Show people calls ther comin' of ther paymaster ther walkin' of ther ghost. Wouldn't mind seein' a ghost o' that kind—Glee-ory to snakes, thar et is!"

His mouth flew open, and he rose from his chair with a yell of astonishment. He had been at the moment half asleep, it seemed to him now.

Where the ghost had come from he did not know; but there it was, near the bend of the corridor.

It must have passed him or made a sound; otherwise, how did its presence there attract his attention?

His lamp was burning low. It had been turned down; but the light was now very faint, as if the wick had burned out or the oil was running low.

But the surprising thing was that what he saw was a skeleton!

A skeleton stood near the bend of the corridor, with its arms, fleshless and bony, plainly visible.

The head and the body were wrapped about with some sort of garment, so that he had no view of them; but those fleshless, bony arms—he could not fail to see them!

"Wough-h-h!"

His favorite exclamation rang through the corridor. His revolver went up.

He remembered that he had boasted he would fire upon the ghost no matter what form it came in.

He pulled the trigger with shaking finger.

Bang—bang—bang—bang!

The revolver flashed and roared, booming out in a perfectly deafening way in that confined space; and the smoke from the shots filled the corridor, obscuring everything.

The roaring shout of the giant, followed by those startling reports, brought young Diamond Dick and Lucky Luke instantly.

They found the giant executing an excited war dance in the corridor, yelling and waving his revolver.

"Thar et is!" he yelled; and, seeing that he now had assistance, he started through the smoke in the direction of the skeleton.

Young Diamond Dick caught up the lamp and turned it up until it gave out more light.

"There is nothing here!" he said, as he held up the lamp.

With great bounds the giant passed the length of the corridor.

"Nothin'—hyer! Wough-h-h!"

He darted to the window and found it closed.

He threw himself against the door which led into a room near the corridor's end, and found it locked.

"Glee-ory to goats, I missed et! How could I? But say—"

He stared at the sport; then again looked up and down the corridor, where the smoke still drifted.

"Say, et war a skeleton!"

"A what?"

"A skeleton! Et warn't like what I expected. Et war jist a skeleton, wrapped in a sheet, er somethin'. An' I couldn't missed et ef I'd tried! But o' course you couldn't kill a —"

He stared around in bewilderment, his confusion of mind and his agitation becoming more pronounced.

"That war shore a skeleton; and a skeleton is dead, ain't et? An' ef a thing is already dead you couldn't expect ter kill et wi' pistol bullets, could ye? An'—

"You weren't asleep and dreaming, Harry? Where did the thing stand?"

"Sleepin', yer granny! Ther thing stood right thar! I war sleepy, but I hadn't been asleep. I jist opened my eyes—I'd been thinkin' about that joke o' Lucky Luke's concernin' ther ghost-walkin' act—an' thar she war, er thar he war! Then I pulled on et!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., did not ask any more questions until he had made an examination of the corridor.

"You were so shaky that you couldn't hit anything!"

"Wow! Couldn't hit—"

"Couldn't hit anything! Come here!"

Handsome Harry moved to the spot where the sport stood.

"Look there, Harry!"

"I'm lookin'. Thar ain't any ghost thar!"

"No; but there are the marks of your bullets. There is one in the corner, and another high up there; and there's the third, in the floor, and the fourth in the ceiling. Do you wonder that you didn't get your man?"

Handsome Harry squinted at the shot holes.

"Wough-h-h! Did I do thet? I shore did, I reckon! But, say—"

"With such shooting as that you could have missed the whole area of a door."

"Yep, I reckon I could; but et wouldn't been possible ter hit a skeleton nohow."

"If you'd had your usual nerve, Harry, that skeleton would be lying dead in this corridor this minute."

The giant stared.

"D'ye think so?"

"I know it."

"Wow! Then I jist ain't goin' ter believe in skeletons ner ghosts, even when I sees 'em! But ef I holds ter that, more sperits is needed."

He took a pull at his liquor flask; then dropped to his chair by the wall, and began to reload his revolver.

"Ef that thing comes up an' lays et's clammy, skeletony hands on me, I ain't goin' ter believe et; but I'm goin' ter send bullets slattin' through ther bars of et's ribs jist ther same! Glee-ory to all goats and ghosts, this hyer beats anything I ever went up ag'in! But ef you fellers can stick et out, you won't see me run. No, sir; I'm Han'some Harry, ther Sarpint o' Siskiyou, wi' seventeen rattles an' a button, an' every one of 'em in good workin' order. Snake fangs full o' pizen, too!" He squinted into the muzzle of his revolver. "Come on, ghost, an' do et ag'in! Next time I bets I gets ye!"

But the "ghost" did not walk again that night.

In the morning all took a look by the clear light of day at the holes which Handsome Harry's revolver had torn in the corridor.

"Wow! I reckon that shootin' would er let an elephant git through, ter say nothin' of a man, er a ghost!"

He admitted this in a crestfallen way, for it reflected on him. Handsome Harry was a good shot with a revolver, but here he had been so shaky of nerve that the veriest amateur could scarcely have done worse shooting. The thing was humiliating.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATE OF SLOCUM.

The thing that troubled young Diamond Dick most was the nonappearance of Slocum.

Slocum did not return to the town, nor did he reappear at the house.

The sport conferred again with Brennan, who was for putting the affair into the hands of the constable.

To this young Diamond Dick objected. The constable was a stupid countryman, who would merely muddle matters by unceasing talk.

After Handsome Harry's startling experience, two nights went by without any happening whatever.

"Ther skeleton found out thet whether I could hit anything er not I would shoot," said the giant, "an' he's kinder reckonin' thet I might have better luck next time. He won't come ag'in."

Which shows that Handsome Harry had come to the conclusion that the appearance of the "skeleton" was a thing played on him for purposes of deception.

"I'll shore bring thet bag o' bones down next time!" he declared whenever he began his nightly watch.

His nerve was to be tested again.

Once more in the early morning hours the ghost stood before him.

Again he had been awakened from a half sleep, perhaps by the entrance of the "thing" into the corridor.

The sight of it standing there, with its fleshless arms showing, rather cooled the giant's fiery zeal; nevertheless, he came to his feet with a yell, and his revolver went up.

"Wow! Try ter skeer me, will ye? I'm Han'some Harry, ther Sarp——"

His revolver began to "talk" when he got that far.

Bang—bang—bang—bang—bang!

He emptied the five chambers as fast as he could pull the trigger.

In the midst of the rattling shots he heard the calls of young Diamond Dick and Lucky Luke.

He also thought he heard the movement of feet in the corridor, in the direction of the "ghost."

But he really could not be sure of anything, for the roar of the revolver was deafening.

Then Diamond Dick, Jr., and the boy acrobat came leaping on the scene as before.

The corridor was again filled with powder smoke.

"We'll have to get smokeless-powder cartridges for you," said the sport. "What did you see?"

"I reckon I ought ter got him thet time! I pulled dead on him!"

"On a man?"

"On ther skeleton. Et 'war ther same old bag o' bones! Ef I didn't hit him, et stands ter reason that's something wrong wi'——"

"With your shooting; yes, I'll agree with that!"

He leaped past the giant and on to the end of the corridor.

The result was as before.

He saw nothing but the drifting and smothering powder smoke.

"Bring the lamp, Luke!" he called.

Lucky Luke hurried forward with the lamp, turning the wick up to get more light.

"We'll see where your bullets went this time, Harry!"

"Wow! What's thet?"

The giant pointed to the floor.

"Glee-ory to snakes, what is et?"

Lucky Luke stared.

"It's a bone—a finger joint!"

Diamond Dick, Jr., stooped and picked from the corridor floor a finger joint of wood, made in imitation of bone.

He held it up in the light of the lamp.

"Wow! I hit et!"

"Yes, you hit it."

"Tore away one o' the skeleton's fingers!"

"Look at the finger, will you, and say what you think of it?"

He placed the piece of wood in the hand of the giant.

Handsome Harry saw at once the character of the deception.

"Wood!"

"Nothing but wood—whittled into that shape. You see it was a fake skeleton!"

"Glee-ory to all deceivers! Wow! Whar did my other bullets go?"

"Just as before—into the walls and floor; you scattered your bullets as a shotgun scatters shot. You were about as excited as you could well be. One of your bullets came near enough to the man to clip off this fake finger joint."

The knowledge that he had beheld but a fake skeleton, proving conclusively that he had been duped all along, had the effect of making the giant intensely angry.

"You'll shoot straight enough next time, Harry!"

"Wough-h-h! Won't I, though? Thar won't be any bulets stickin' permiscuous round in ther walls; I'll plunk every one o' 'em inter the thing I'm shootin' at, knowin' et's a man."

"I've said all along that it was a man."

"I know ye did; but——"

"When the proof comes, you're ready to believe!"
 "I'm convinced that I've been skeered by shadders; an' I reckons that I won't be ag'in! Wow! Come ag'in, Mr. Skeleton, fer I'm layin' fer you dead and hard frum this on!"

But the skeleton did not come again that night, nor did anything appear for several nights thereafter.

The discovery—or rather the proof—that the ghostly visits were being made by a man, or men, showing that all the strange sounds were of human origin, had an enlivening and encouraging effect.

Even young Diamond Dick felt better; though he had known from the first that this must be so. It had been very disconcerting and depressing to watch night after night, with strange and unaccountable things happening! Hence this proof of human agency came even as a relief to him.

The vigilance of the entire party was exercised to the utmost, but without result, until almost another week had passed away.

In all that time Slocum had been sought for diligently, but in vain.

That night Lucky Luke was sitting in the corridor, at the upper end, near the stairway.

Suddenly, without warning, something flirted out through the half-darkness, with the softness of a bat's wing.

It fell over him, in strangling and choking folds, meshing him from head to foot.

At the same instant he was drawn by it over the floor.

His wild yell for help rang out; and instantly young Diamond Dick came leaping down the corridor, having been wide awake and ready when the call reached him.

The boy acrobat yelled again, and tried to throw off the strange thing that enveloped him, as he was pulled along the floor.

Then suddenly he was left lying in the corridor, gasping.

When Handsome Harry came up, bearing the lamp, he found only young Diamond Dick and Lucky Luke in the corridor.

Lucky Luke was enveloped in what seemed to be a light fishing seine, which had been tossed over him.

His struggles had wound him in it tightly, and the sport was cutting it with his knife to free him.

"Make a search along the corridor!" young Diamond Dick commanded.

Handsome Harry made the search, and young Diamond Dick duplicated it as soon as he had the boy acrobat free.

"It was possible this time for a man to have come in at that window, where the limb of the tree hangs over," said the sport. "The window was open."

"And it wasn't open before!" said Luke, very positively.

"I'm really glad this thing happened, inasmuch as Lucky Luke is still lucky."

"Glee-ory! How's thet? Glad et happened?"

"It shows how Slocum was dragged away."

"Wow! You don't mean et?"

"Yes; I think this shows how he met his death; for I'm pretty certain now he is dead. He was trapped, or meshed, in that way; and he was dragged away before we could get to him. Of course he was killed."

"And Luke would er been killed?"

"If that demon had dragged him from the corridor he would have killed him, if given the time to do it in; I haven't any doubt now of that."

"We're up agin' somethin' that's wuss than ghosts!"

"We are, very decidedly."

"Up against men! Wow! I'm glad ter feel dead shore of et! Fightin' men, an' especially rascals, is my strong holt!"

"We're up against a desperate band of villains and murderers; there's no doubt of it. They killed Slocum; and if they get one of us in their power they'll not stop at murder, in our case, any more than in his. I'm sure now Slocum was killed. That explains his long absence and silence."

Whoever had thrown the seine over the head of Lucky Luke had disappeared without leaving a trace.

An examination of the window, and of the tree which stood not far from it, suggested the manner of his entrance to and exit from the corridor.

He had apparently climbed into the tree.

As the distance from the limb nearest the house to the window was seemingly too great to be jumped, it seemed likely that he had made use of some sort of light ladder, which he had carried away with him in his flight.

An examination brought out and strengthened these suppositions.

But the man himself had vanished.

The seine was carefully inspected, and was found to be a very light fishing seine, such as was used in the river.

For the remainder of the night young Diamond Dick kept watch outside in the darkness, with Lucky Luke and Handsome Harry wide awake and vigilant in the house.

But this watch developed nothing.

Not a thing stirred, either within or without the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOATMAN.

The following night young Diamond Dick did not enter the house at all, but took his station, after dark, near the river, close by the rear of the building.

Handsome Harry and the boy acrobat took their stations in the house, in the now familiar corridor.

Some time after midnight, as the sport was watching in the darkness, he heard a light splash, like the sound of a dipping oar blade.

On a previous occasion Lucky Luke had heard a similar sound.

Bertie half rose from his place of concealment in some bushes, and looked up the river, for the sound seemed to proceed from that direction.

There a boat appeared in the semi-darkness, gliding silently down the stream.

One man sat in it, and he was using the paddle in canoeing fashion.

The gloom was so great that Bertie could hardly discern the outline of the boat, and the human form seated in it swinging the oar blade.

The boat drifted close up to the old landing place, and there disappeared.

A moment or two afterward the boatman was seen stealing toward the house.

Before Bertie could intercept him, or could even make a movement to do so, the man was lost to sight.

"He must have left his boat there somewhere, and he'll come back to it!"

With this thought young Diamond Dick stepped softly in the direction of the river.

He felt sure that the man had vanished into the house, but there was no way of conveying this fact to the knowledge of Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke.

Drawn up by the bank and tied to a swaying bush by a small cotton cord, young Diamond Dick found the boat, with the oar lying in it.

He felt over it very carefully, and found that it contained only the oar.

Having made this discovery, and being sure that the man would soon return, young Diamond Dick crouched down to await his coming.

Scarcely had he done so when he heard a yell from Handsome Harry.

"Wough-h-h! Did ye hear et?" he heard the giant roar. "Thar et goes ag'in; ther ghost is onc't more rasslin' wi' thet chain!"

He heard the tramp of the heavy feet of Handsome Harry and the lighter patter of the shoes of Lucky Luke; and he heard conversation in excited tones.

Then the sport heard the house shake, as something heavy seemed to be rammed against it.

He could afford to smile, knowing pretty well now how these things were done.

"That fellow must have had a good many laughs at our expense," was his thought, as the comments of the giant and his companion drifted to him.

The words and shouts died away.

After that, silence reigned for more than half an hour.

Then the watchful sport detected the boatman slipping toward the river.

Apparently the man had made his "ghost" sounds, for the purpose of frightening the watchers, and was now ready to depart.

The sport held himself in readiness for a fight, for he did not expect to take the man without a struggle.

The man came slowly to the bank and peered down for his boat.

Putting his hand on the cotton string that held the boat he began to draw it ashore.

As he straightened to untie the string, with one foot in the boat, being ready to push off, the sport sprang on him, without a sound or a note of warning.

The man was resting his weight on the foot that was planted in the boat; and the rush of the sport, with the flouncing motion of the man as he turned to meet his unexpected enemy, shot the boat away from the shore.

The next moment the sport felt himself thrown into the boat, being jerked forward by the man's motion and by his own momentum, while the boatman tumbled with a splash into the water.

Righting himself as quickly as he could, and getting hold of the oar, young Diamond Dick stopped the progress of the boat by a sweep of the oar blade, and leaning over looked for the reappearance of the man.

He expected to see him come bobbing to the surface like a cork; but the man did not reappear.

A minute passed by, and still the man's head did not come up.

With the oar blade moving to keep the boat in position, the sport waited and watched.

He was anxious to capture the man, and he was anathematizing the luck which had let him escape.

Still the man was not to be seen.

"He swam ashore, keeping under water," was the sport's conclusion.

He pushed and pulled the boat along the shore.

Up and down the bank he rowed, looking and peering everywhere.

The man could not be found.

Considerably chagrined, young Diamond Dick at last drove the boat to the bank, and tied it to the bush with the cotton string which was still attached to the bow.

Retiring a short distance from the bank, and making a noisy pretense of a departure from the place, he crept back to the edge of the river; and there lying down he waited, hoping the man would try to get the boat.

In this he was disappointed.

When morning came the boat bobbed on the water at the end of the cotton string and had not been disturbed.

When Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke, leaving the house at daybreak, joined him, he showed them the boat, and told them what had happened.

The only thing they had to tell was of hearing those strange sounds in the night.

They had seen nothing.

Drifting down the river in the boat to the town, young Diamond Dick drove it up to the Quivaro boat landing.

"I found this boat adrift on the river," he said, speaking to an old man who was standing at the landing. "Do you know who it belongs to?"

The old man came up and looked it over.

"That's Lawyer Brennan's boat," he said. "Whar did ye find it?"

"On the river, a mile or so above here. It was adrift; and I thought it must belong to some one here, so I brought it down."

"It's Brennan's boat!"

The sport was astonished, but he managed to conceal it.

"Does he go out on the river at night?" he asked.

"Waal, he goes fishin' a good deal, when it's fishin' time. Fish is bitin' purty peart now."

"You don't know if he was out last night?"

The old man could not answer as to that.

"Wow! Do ye reckon thet lawyer sharp is inter this thing?" said the giant, when young Diamond Dick told him of his discovery concerning the ownership of the boat.

"I can't answer you," he said.

Then he took his way to Brennan's office.

The hour was so early that Brennan was not in; but he came sauntering lazily along after a while, smoking his cigar.

"Hello!" he cried, extending his hand lazily. "How are the ghosts getting along? Made the acquaintance of any of them yet?"

Young Diamond Dick looked at him keenly.

"Yes," he said; "I found one of them in your boat last night!"

"What?"

The lawyer fairly shouted the question; and his amazement was either genuine or he was a most excellent actor.

"I found one in your boat," the sport repeated.

"How did that happen?"

"Perhaps you can tell me; I don't know."

Then he told Brennan of what he had seen, and of how he had brought the boat down to the landing, where it was identified by the old man.

Brennan looked at him intently.

"Say, you don't think I'm into that business? If you do, you're doing me an injustice and making a big mistake. Some scalawag stole that boat last night and used it, that's all. I hope you drowned the dog."

"I don't think he was drowned. He was simply a good swimmer; and when he found he would be captured, likely, if he rose to the surface, he swam under the water until he was beyond sight. That did not need to be a great distance, for the night was pretty dark."

When young Diamond Dick told of the attempt to capture Lucky Luke with the fishing seine, and gave his theory of the death of Slocum, Brennan was apparently even more astonished.

"The murderous scoundrels!" he exclaimed, puffing nervously at his cigar. "I think it's time for you to put this matter in the hands of the constable and the justice of the peace. Slocum has been killed!"

"He's been killed, yes; but those fellows would only muddle the matter. Wait a little longer; I'm going to find out who was in your boat."

CHAPTER VIII.

DION TIMBERLAKE.

To his other work young Diamond Dick now added that of shadowing Brennan.

He was inclined to the belief that Brennan was honest; yet it was his practice not to neglect anything. He must be sure that Brennan was honest.

This extra work left him little enough time for sleep.

Brennan, as he discovered, was in the habit of playing cards each afternoon at the saloon of Patsy Collins.

Young Diamond Dick began to cultivate the acquaintance of Patsy Collins and of the people who frequented his place.

He engaged in some of the card games, and, being a player of extraordinary skill, he soon attracted more than ordinary attention.

"Egad! you're an all-round man!" said Brennan, slapping him jovially on the shoulders and congratulating him on certain winnings. "If I could handle the pasteboards as you do I'd give up my law practice and turn gambler."

Into the saloon of Patsy Collins there came, the second afternoon of the sport's playing, a man who looked at him keenly, and then challenged him for a card game.

The man was Dion Timberlake.

He was smooth-faced, a mere youth in appearance, and he belonged to one of the oldest families of the community.

He had been to college, and at intervals had read law with Brennan. He and Brennan were friends and intimates.

Timberlake was reputed to be wealthy. His father had left him a good deal of property and money; and though he lived rather a fast life, and was said to spend his money like water when he was away in the cities, he was popular in Quivaro, more for his father's sake, perhaps, than for his own.

"I think I'd like to try a game with you," he said, in a challenging tone, addressing young Diamond Dick.

"Brennan has been telling me wonderful stories about your skill and your luck. I play cards myself, a little."

He had the reputation of being a regular card sharp. The sport, looking at him closely, announced his extreme willingness to accommodate him.

He observed that Timberlake was pale, with a sort of sickly pallor, which suggested late hours and dissipation.

He saw the young man's hands shake nervously as he shuffled the cards.

Timberlake played skillfully and with studied carelessness.

While the play went on young Diamond Dick studied the face and manner of his antagonist more than he did his own cards, and, as a consequence, lost from the start.

"Hello, this won't do!" was his thought.

He turned his attention to the play, and at once began to win.

He won back the money he had lost, and then continued his winnings.

"Curse you for a thief!" Timberlake cried, suddenly. "I saw you cheating that time!"

As he said it, he threw a revolver forward, plucking it quickly from the breast of his coat.

Young Diamond Dick slid downward out of his chair, and as the revolver sounded at the same instant, Brennan and others in the room supposed that the sport had received the bullet.

They were instantly undeceived, when they saw the sport beneath the table seize Timberlake by the legs, and rising, throw him backward on the floor, with the table piling heavily on top of him.

Timberlake tried to fire again, but the sport, who was now out from under the table, having thrown it from his back over upon the prostrate young man, prevented this by crowding the table down on his enemy's breast.

In another moment he had leaped forward and torn the revolver away.

Facing the prostrate Timberlake with his weapon, the sport bade him rise.

"Get up, you hound!" he commanded.

Timberlake shoved the chair aside and rose on his elbow, glaring at young Diamond Dick.

"Give me a show, and I'll kill you!" he panted.

"Yes, I know that's what you want to do," was the answer. "Get up, and I'll give you a chance to kill me; at the same time I'll see if I can get my bullet in first!"

Timberlake's face was white, with a red spot burning in each cheek.

"Get up!" said the sport. "You thought to kill me, and I know why; but I'll give you another chance to try it! When you fail——"

Timberlake rose unsteadily.

His arm dropped weakly at his side. He looked at it as if annoyed.

The sport understood, being able to read that as easily as he had read the sudden change in Timberlake's expression. That dropped and apparently injured arm had been strong enough but a moment before to push back the table; now it seemed not able to support its own weight. It was Timberlake's pistol arm, too!

"Bah! You won't fight me!" said the sport, with icy contempt.

"I—I can't lift my arm!" Timberlake pleaded.

"He'll fight you another day," said Brennan, wrathfully. "You can see that his pistol hand is helpless now!"

"Brennan," said the sport, "when you know more you will understand more!"

"What do you mean by that? Do you want to fight me?"

"I do not want to fight you, and do not intend to; and as for what I mean I'll take pleasure in fully explaining to you at a later date. I know what I'm doing."

He flipped open the revolver cylinder and extracted the cartridges.

"To make sure that he doesn't shoot me as I go out of the door!" he explained, with fine scorn.

Then he pitched the revolver to Timberlake and left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

STILL INVESTIGATING.

Young Diamond Dick was sure that he had found at least one of the "ghosts," and that his name was Dion Timberlake.

This important discovery he communicated without delay to Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke.

"He thought to make a sudden attack on me, as I sat unprepared at that table, and kill me, excusing himself by the claim that I was cheating him. This is a gambling community, and he stands high here. Tried

by a jury, as he would have been if he had killed me, he would have got off easily.

"He sees that, having undertaken to run down the mystery of that haunted house, I am not a quitter. Other men before him have found that out."

"You bet! A plenty of 'em!" assented Handsome Harry.

"If he killed me, he fancied that would stop the investigation into the mystery, and the haunted house would still remain the haunted house. There is some dark work going on there, which he wishes to keep hid."

"What do you suppose it is?" asked Luke.

"I can't say now; but Timberlake, and no doubt others—sometimes I think Brennan is one of them—are using that house to cover up some kind of unlawful work. Hence they started the ghost business, to frighten timid people away from it, and to keep any one from buying it or occupying it. But I'm going to the bottom of the thing. Slocum was too venturesome—did not drop the thing quick enough—and they made away with him. We'll see if they can make away with me. That attack in the saloon was the first attempt. I don't think it will be the last."

Yet, feeling that his life was now in great danger, young Diamond Dick did not for a moment drop the work to which he was devoting all his energies.

He merely increased his caution, and took more care to secure his personal safety and that of his friends.

The attack made on him by Dion Timberlake gave him grounds for speaking of Timberlake now and then.

Men came to him, congratulating him on the outcome of the affair.

This showed that while Timberlake was popular, his popularity was confined to a class, and did not extend to the whole community. Many men in Quivaro did not think any too highly of the young aristocrat, whose conduct both at home and abroad had now and then approached the scandalous.

With such men young Diamond Dick conversed, and he was able thus to get at the whole of Timberlake's history.

It was not a creditable history.

Timberlake was known to have run through the fortune left him by his father. Yet he was still a high liver, spending large sums of money on his vices and his frivolities.

It was generally supposed that he obtained this money by gambling.

He was reputed to be an expert gambler, and it was thought that in his frequent visits to various Southern and Western cities he exercised his gambling talents in a manner to keep his pockets well filled.

Diamond Dick, Jr., had now a different theory to account for the money possessed by Dion Timberlake; yet of this theory he did not speak to any of the villagers. He appeared to assume, with them, that Timberlake came by his money by gambling.

Though he had made threats against the life of the sport, Timberlake now avoided him, and as young Diamond Dick ceased to frequent Patsy Collins' saloon as suddenly as he had begun, this was not a difficult thing for Timberlake, who continued to make that place his headquarters.

While thus engaged in investigating the antecedents of Dion Timberlake, young Diamond Dick went right on with his investigations of the mystery of the haunted house, saying nothing to make anyone think he connected Timberlake with those mysteries.

Brennan now avoided the sport, showing that his sympathies were with Timberlake and the sport did not pursue him to patch up a friendship.

In fact, he was beginning to think that Brennan knew as much about the haunted house as Timberlake did, and that he had been somewhat unwise and shortsighted in taking Brennan into his confidence.

The ghostly manifestations at the haunted house experienced a lull.

Chains ceased to rattle, the house no more jarred as if lifted by an earthquake shock, those unearthly wailings and heartrending shrieks did not sound again. Until several nights had passed away nothing occurred.

During those nights young Diamond Dick screened himself and watched outside by the margin of the river, hoping again to see the boatman.

He believed now that the mysterious boatman, who had tumbled from Brennan's boat into the water and had then vanished, was either Brennan himself or Dion Timberlake.

While he abandoned this watch temporarily one night, and retreated to the house for a talk there with Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke, there was a recurrence of the ghostly noises.

Yet they were not of the character of those heard before.

This time it was as if something was being pushed or slipped over a floor.

"'Sh!' said young Diamond Dick, holding up his hand in warning, when the sound reached him.

All listened.

Then they heard it plainly—a sound as of something being moved.

"That's in the cellar!" said the sport.

He took the lamp, and with his friends following him, moved to the rickety stairs leading to the cellar.

Down these he crept, making as little noise as possible.

There was a door at the foot of the stairs, which was closed.

The sounds which had seemed to come from the cellar had ceased.

As they stood by that door, ready to push it open, Lucky Luke laid his hand with nervous force on the sport's arm.

"The dip of an oar!" he whispered.

Then they heard it—an oar blade dipped softly on the river, but a few yards away.

When they opened the door and entered the cellar they saw nothing out of the ordinary.

To all seeming the cellar had not been disturbed in any way.

The moldy floor showed no imprints of feet; the sticky wet cobwebs that hung listlessly in the dark corners had not been disturbed.

"He wasn't in the cellar," was the sport's positive affirmation.

"Where then?" queried the boy acrobat.

"I don't know."

Leaving the cellar and returning to the rooms above, Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke watched there, while the sport went outside to his post by the river.

But the boat was gone; it had been given abundant time in which to get away, and he scarcely expected to find it there.

When day came a search was made along the bank.

At the point where the boat had been held by the cotton string, at the time of young Diamond Dick's rather startling experience, an indentation was found in the soft mud, which seemed to have been made by the boat's prow, and near it were some shoe marks.

But when the path leading to the cellar door was scanned nothing was discovered.

The cellar door, moldy and green from neglect, seemed not to have been touched.

The mystery of the haunted house was still a mystery, though the investigators had reached the healthy conclusion that it was haunted by real, live men and not spirits of dead ones.

Beyond that all was yet darkness.

Yet it was a great gain in the right direction.

It stiffened the courage of Handsome Harry and made him as self-reliant and as much to be depended on as of old; and Handsome Harry, rightly aroused, was a host in himself, as young Diamond Dick had long since proved to his perfect satisfaction.

"Some one was here last night, and went away again. The sounds he made seemed to come from the cellar, but he wasn't in the cellar. He removed something, and took it away in that boat; and whatever it was, it was heavy enough to scrape on the floor, as he dragged or pushed it along."

These were the sport's conclusions, and though they seemed of slight value, they appeared to indicate that the "ghosts" were becoming alarmed.

The one who had penetrated to the house had apparently lain in waiting, perhaps for several nights, until the sport absented himself from the river, and then he had done his work quickly.

If this were so, it showed that the fact that young Diamond Dick was watching there by the river was known.

"And that implicates Brennan," he said, "for I told Brennan about the watch I was keeping by the river!"

CHAPTER X.

A CAPTURE.

Young Diamond Dick and his companions did not abate the vigilance of their watch at the haunted house.

Each night, after darkness had fallen, they slipped to it, and, entering stealthily, began their vigil.

Even Handsome Harry had by this time lost all fear of the mysterious.

Knowing now that he had real flesh and blood men to deal with he was as cool and heroic as need be.

The sport had slowly worked to certain conclusions.

One was that the man who had attacked Lucky Luke, and tried to drag him out of the house in the fishing seine, had come in through the window, and had reached the window from the tree.

He had evidently expected to smother the boy in

the folds of the net, and then bear him away, or possibly kill him in the corridor.

That he had aimed at the life of Lucky Luke seemed as certain as that Slocum had been put out of the way.

Another conclusion was that at the other end of the corridor, where the skeleton "appearances" had occurred, there was a secret door.

That door must be in one of the panels of the wall; but, search as he would for it, the sport could not find it, so cleverly was it concealed.

With all the lights in the house extinguished, and his companions stationed at convenient points, the sport now set himself the task of watching that corridor.

His watch was rewarded.

Sitting in perfect silence in the darkness, he heard a slight sound, and then saw one of the panels of the wall move.

A moment later a man appeared in the opening in the panel.

He advanced into the corridor and stood looking about.

With a shout for assistance, young Diamond Dick hurled himself upon the midnight intruder.

The response was a blow from a revolver, which struck him squarely in the forehead, knocking him down and rendering him almost unconscious, and for the instant quite helpless.

When he came clearly to a recognition of what was happening he found himself clasped in strong arms and being borne down what seemed to be a flight of stairs.

The place was as dark as pitch.

He had also a feeling that the quarters were cramped and narrow, for the man stooped and twisted in moving along, and the air had a foul and stuffy odor.

Though the sport's senses had returned to him, he still felt dazed and much bewildered.

Therefore, he lay perfectly still, without sign of life or motion, and permitted the man to bear him downward, as it seemed, toward the cellar.

When the bottom of the stairs was gained he was tossed down on the cold stone floor with as little care as if he had been a bale of goods.

He fell heavily, and lay doubled up in a heap.

He could see nothing; and for a time he did not move.

The man cursed slowly, under his breath, and then struck a match to light a lamp.

Then, through half-shut eyes the sport saw—Brennan!

The discovery was an astonishing one.

Brennan held in one hand the revolver with which he had knocked down the sport.

With the other hand he lighted the lamp.

By the time he had done this the sport was ready for action.

He knew that if given the opportunity Brennan would kill him.

It almost dazed him to think how he had been deceived by this man.

As Brennan stooped and set the lamp chimney in place on the lamp, the sport thrust out his feet suddenly, striking him in the hips.

Brennan went over against the table, knocking off the lamp chimney and dropping one hand into the flame of the lamp.

A cursing roar came from his lips, and he tried to turn and shoot his assailant.

But he found that in the supposed unconscious sport he had something very like human chain lightning to deal with.

The sport was on his feet.

Swinging a blow with his right hand, he struck Brennan's pistol hand and knocked the revolver with a clatter to the stone floor.

Then the men closed.

"Curse you!" Brennan grunted, aiming a blow at the sport's face as they came together.

The sport's arm, closed about him, and, though Brennan was much the heavier man, he felt himself lifted bodily from his feet.

Driving his fist into young Diamond Dick's face, he partially broke the sport's hold, and then the two, clasping each other, swayed and panted for a moment, each trying to get the other at a disadvantage.

Again young Diamond Dick's lithe arms closed about the lawyer, and this time, bending him backward, he broke the lawyer's hold.

An instant later Brennan went backward, his feet tripped from under him, and fell heavily, striking his head on the stones.

The fall was so terrible that the breath was driven out of his body, and the contact of his head with the hard stones reduced him to temporary unconsciousness.

Young Diamond Dick, realizing what his advantage meant, threw himself on the prostrate man, and flash-

ing out a pair of handcuffs snapped them upon Brennan's wrists.

Another pair of irons quickly ornamented the lawyer's ankles.

The light of the lamp was streaming up and filling the place with foul odors.

Stepping to it, young Diamond Dick readjusted the chimney.

When he turned back he saw Brennan staring at him in a fearsome and bewildered way.

The lawyer tried to start up, and discovered that his hands were held together by the steel bracelets.

A look of fear swept across his pain-racked face.

Diamond Dick, Jr., was breathing heavily from his exertions, but seemed otherwise cool and collected.

He folded his arms across his chest, and stood before the trapped and bewildered lawyer.

"Friend Brennan, this meeting is indeed a surprise!"

Again Brennan tried to sit up, and came to a sitting posture.

He pulled at the handcuffs, and stared at them; and then at the irons on his legs.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Ah, you don't know!"

"Come, tell me what is the meaning of this?"

He was making a vain attempt at bluster. It was a foolish and hopeless attempt, as he must have known, yet there was nothing else he could do.

"It simply means that you called on me! I didn't expect you to make a call—in that way! But you are welcome here, as my guest, Brennan!"

"Stop this mockery!" Brennan exclaimed.

"Very well, we will stop it!"

"Take these things off me!"

"You came uninvited, Brennan; and I'm afraid you would go away without permission, if I did so. I don't think there is any use of your making a pretense of ignorance. It won't work."

Brennan glared at him.

If looks could kill, the sport would have fallen dead at the feet of the man he had captured.

"You're a clever man, Brennan; in fact, I don't think I ever came across one more clever. You fooled me slick; but you can't fool me any more. I know you, and what you are."

"What?" Brennan fumed.

He moved uneasily, and that made his ankle chains rattle.

"You're a candidate for the penitentiary, if not for the gallows!"

Brennan stared helplessly.

The flush of excitement and anger had gone out of his face, and it was now of a deathly pallor.

Sounds were heard coming from the direction of the hidden stairway.

Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke, having heard the conflict, or part of it, and having found the panel door open, were descending to investigate.

A moment later the rays of the lamp they had lighted streamed into the narrow place.

It was a very narrow place, only a few feet wide, but as long as the cellar.

"Come right on!" young Diamond Dick called to his friends. "I'm all right!"

Handsome Harry hurried forward, bearing a lamp.

"Glee-ory! Wake up snakes and lick lickerish! What air we got hyer?"

"Brennan!"

"What?"

"Our friend, Brennan. He made a hurried and unceremonious call on me, coming through that mysterious hidden door. He tried to trap me, but I succeeded in trapping him. You've met Brennan?"

Brennan cursed wildly, as Handsome Harry, holding the lamp aloft, looked down on him.

"This is an outrage!" he panted. "I'll put you fellows through for this!"

"Wough-h-h! Spittin' pizen, air ye? I didn't like ther looks o' you frum the fust. So you'll put us through, will ye? What war you doin' in this hyer house at this time o' night?"

"What were you doing here?"

"What war we-wow! By all ther triangular snakes, but you've shore got gall! What war we doin' hyer?"

"I've as much right to come into this house as you have, I think!"

The sport turned toward him with a show of impatience.

"Denials do you no good, and there's no room for an argument. You slipped into the corridor through a hidden door. I rushed at you, and you knocked me down with your revolver, and then carried me down here. But though you thought you had me, you see you didn't. I shall hold you, and deliver you over to the

proper authorities, and proceed against you for the murder of Slocum."

Brennan began to fume again.

He could not bring himself to submit to the inevitable.

Young Diamond Dick turned to his friends.

"There's at least another man in this thing, as I know, and that man is Dion Timberlake."

"We'll try ter trap him," said the giant, divining the sport's intention.

"If he isn't to be trapped here, I shall arrest him promptly in the town."

"And what good will that do you?" asked Brennan. "You fellows are a set of fools!"

"Wough-h-h! We air?"

"You are—a set of fools! Let me show you. Slocum made me his agent, in his negotiations for the purchase of this house, and I've done law business for him. I'm still his agent."

"Wow! He's dead!"

"That's what you say; but you haven't any proof of it. I'm his agent. He has disappeared. Strange things are reported as happening in this house. As his agent, I came up here to-night to look into them, and I was jumped on by you fellows, and am now held by you as a prisoner!"

The line of Brennan's clever defense was apparent.

"You say certain things, but how are you going to prove them?"

He looked defiantly at his captors.

The shock of his capture was passing away. He was again becoming the clear-headed, calculating scoundrel, cleverer than most men, and looking desperately for a loophole that would let him out of his unpleasant situation with some show of honor.

"You fellows, with no authority from anybody to show that you have a right in this house, set a watch here. I've no doubt that a good deal of this mummery business which has been going on here has been done by you. What your motives were, or are, I don't know. But you can't hold me up this way, in a house of which I'm the agent, and expect to win out in it! I'm not so big a fool as you think me."

"You're not a fool at all, Brennan," said the sport; "you're simply a cunning rascal. What your work has been here I don't know, but I shall find out."

"I'm Slocum's agent, and I shall have you fellows

arrested for assault, and for trespass in coming into this house. Since Slocum has disappeared, I'm the only man who has any right to give permission to any one to come into this house. Show your authority for being in this house!"

Young Diamond Dick turned away with an impatient shrug of his shoulders.

"Brennan, before we get through with you, you'll be satisfied that we have authority enough, and law enough, for what we're doing."

He turned again to his friends.

"Luke," he said, "here's Brennan's revolver. Stay here and watch him, to see that he doesn't get away; and shoot any man that tries to enter this place."

"I'll do it!"

The boy acrobat took the revolver and squatted down on the one chair the place afforded.

"Harry, come with me!"

Taking Handsome Harry, young Diamond Dick climbed the narrow stairway and ascended to the corridor.

"I think I begin to understand the situation," he said, as they stepped out into the corridor through the panel door. "The walls of this house are double!"

"This one is, anyhow!"

"The house was built by Murrill, the famous, or infamous, river pirate, and in building it he provided these double walls, which extend also to the cellar. Behind these walls the noises were made which we could not locate. All that 'ghost' business is as clear as day now."

CHAPTER XI.

TIMBERLAKE AGAIN.

Having made a hasty inspection of the house within and without, and the grounds, they discovered that Brennan's boat was again tied up by the river.

"Brennan must have been alone," was the sport's conclusion, when he found the boat. "It was Brennan who fell from the boat into the river that night when I tried to capture him. But I've got the scoundrel now!"

Returning to the house and extinguishing the light, they descended once more to the narrow inclosure where Lucky Luke watched over the prisoner.

They found that during their absence Brennan had made frantic attempts to bribe the boy to let him escape.

He could walk, he claimed, even with the chain on his legs, and he would reward the boy handsomely.

This having failed, he sat glowering sulkily at Lucky Luke, and was in that attitude and temper when the sport and the giant returned.

"Luke, slip out by the river. The boat is again here. Hide in the bushes and keep a watch on it."

Lucky Luke departed hastily to take up this work.

He had not been gone long when they heard him rapping on the cellar door.

They were not in the cellar, but in between the double cellar wall, yet they could hear the boy.

"The boat is gone!" they heard him say, in an excited whisper.

"Gone?"

Young Diamond Dick again ascended the hidden stairway and let himself softly out of the house.

Going round to the cellar door he found the boy acrobat there.

Together they went to the river, which was not far away.

The boat was gone!

"Some one was with Brennan," said the sport. "My guess is that it was Timberlake. Well, if he takes fright and tries to get out of the country I'll give him a pretty chase."

Yet here the sport was mistaken—in supposing that Timberlake had been there and had departed with the boat.

Brennan had come to the house alone in the boat.

He had tied it insecurely with the cotton string, merely making a little slip knot; and in feeling over this string, when the boat was discovered, our friends had pulled this knot loose.

The boat had simply drifted away, and was now floating down toward the town.

For some time young Diamond Dick and the boy acrobat lay in hiding by the river.

Finally young Diamond Dick returned to the house, leaving Lucky Luke to watch.

"Come and rap on the cellar door if anything happens, or you make any discovery," the sport instructed him, and then hurried away.

Young Diamond Dick was almost tempted to go to the town and there seek for Dion Timberlake, or arrest

him when he came down the river, if he were in the missing boat.

It was as well that he did not try this.

Dion Timberlake was not in the boat, but he was at the Quivaro boat landing.

He knew that Brennan had gone to the "haunted house," and he was anxious to meet him and have a talk with him on his return.

Both he and Brennan had been made very nervous by the pertinacity with which young Diamond Dick clung to his work of investigating the mysterious house.

In his desperation Timberlake had, it will be remembered, sought to shoot the sport, in the saloon of Patsy Collins.

He had failed so signally that he had not had the courage to again attack the sport.

Sitting on the broken timbers at the landing, striking matches now and then, and by their light examining his watch, Timberlake was astonished when a river fisherman came up to the landing in the darkness, dragging a boat behind his own and declaring it to be Brennan's.

"Was Mr. Brennan out on the river to-night?" asked the fisherman. "'Cause why, if he was, I reckon somethin's happened to him. I jist now run across his boat out there, drifting down the river. I reckon he must 'a' fell out of it."

Dion Timberlake struck another match and examined the boat.

"Yes, it's Brennan's," he admitted. "I wonder what he was doing out on the river? He must have been out fishing!"

He was more startled than he would show to this man.

He knew that Brennan had gone in his boat up the river to the haunted house, and the finding of the boat on the river seemed to indicate that an accident, or something worse, had befallen him.

"If he fell out of his boat there ain't no use lookin' fer him—not to-night, anyway," said the man.

Another man came sauntering down to the landing.

This man was a gambler, Oscar Congreve by name,

and he was an intimate associate of both Timberlake and Brennan.

"No, I don't suppose anything can be done to-night," Timberlake assented. "And I really don't think anything has happened to Brennan. How his boat got away from him would be pure conjecture; but he must have let it get away while he was fishing. He'll turn up all right to-morrow."

But when the fisherman had gone on into the town Timberlake spoke to Congreve, in an anxious tone.

"I think we'd better pull up to the haunted house, Congreve; something has happened to Brennan, sure."

"His boat may have just got away from him, as you said."

"I don't believe it; he's too clever for that. Jump in, and we'll row up there and take a quiet look around."

"I suppose those fellows are still up there? They were last night!"

"Yes, they're there every night now. We'll simply have to lie low until they get tired of their job and leave. It was a fool trick for Brennan to visit the house to-night, and I said so to him when he set out; but he would go. He thought he'd like to scare them again."

"They don't scare worth a cent," said Congreve, as he took a seat in the boat.

There were a pair of oars lying across the thwarts, and these Timberlake took up, as he pushed the boat away from the landing. One of the oars he passed to Congreve, who was a lusty young fellow, well able to pull a good stroke.

"It won't take us long to get up there," said Timberlake, as he pointed the head of the boat up the stream. "Now, lay down to it!"

Pulling together, with sturdy strokes, they sent the boat along at a lively pace, in the teeth of the current.

By and by the upper part of the dark roof of the haunted house showed in the gloom above the tree tops.

"There she is," said Congreve, resting on his oar. "Now what?"

"We'll run up to the shore, at the old landing point,

and see what we can see. And we want to be careful, too, or we may get into trouble, particularly if Brennan has tumbled into the clutches of those fellows!"

It was a warning worth heeding.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

Diamond Dick, Jr., and Handsome Harry had returned to their prisoner.

Brennan sat huddled in the corner of the narrow space, glaring with the sullen rage of some trapped animal.

"How much is it worth to you to let me go?" he demanded at length of young Diamond Dick.

The sport paid no heed.

"Just say how much it is worth to you!"

"More than you can pay, Brennan!"

"But mention the sum—make it big—and I'll contrive to raise it."

Handsome Harry looked at him scornfully.

"Glee-ory to sarpints! Et warn't but a little while ago that you war sayin' what you'd do to us, and that you had more right in this hyer house than we did, an'—"

"Just say what it's worth to you!" Brennan urged. "You fellows like money as well as the next man, and I know it! Name a price. Maybe I can meet it."

"It's going to be awkward for you, when this thing comes out!" said the sport, severely.

"You're saying that just to get me to put my offer away up. Well, I will put it up. Say fifteen thousand dollars—that's five thousand each for the three of you! How does that strike you? You can't make that much money any easier!"

"We're not in this business to sell ourselves out to rascals for money, Brennan! Just put that in your pipe and smoke it. We've got you, and—"

He was interrupted by a rapping on the cellar door.

"Hello!" he called, in a low tone.

Lucky Luke answered:

"Some fellows are coming up the river. I heard their oars just now."

"I don't think you can get out of here, Brennan; and if you do you can't go far!"

With this adieu the sport hastened out of the house, mounting with Handsome Harry by way of the narrow stairway.

"Thet feller will holler and give 'em warning!" the giant grumbled.

"All right; let him!"

They were scarcely at Lucky Luke's side, by the river, when a roaring shout was heard from Brennan.

Words were also heard from him, but these were indistinguishable through the heavy walls.

Diamond Dick, Jr., Handsome Harry and Lucky Luke crouched in the darkness by the river.

"That's all right; just let him howl!" said the sport, referring to Brennan's cries. "It will simply bewilder and puzzle those fellows, if they are his friends."

The sounds of rowing had ceased.

Timberlake and Congreve had heard those cries from within the house and were listening.

"That sounds like Brennan's voice," said Congreve.

"Yes, it does; but what does it mean? Is he kicking up that sort of a racket while playing ghost?"

They could not tell; for, while they knew that words were being spoken, they could not understand what was said.

Dipping their oars they drew cautiously near the shore.

Then they halted again, and listened.

"I believe the rascal is in trouble," said Timberlake.

"We'll see what's up!"

So saying he drove the nose of the boat against the bank and, dropping his oar, sprang out on the shore.

Congreve did the same.

As they thus landed three revolvers were thrust into their faces. Behind those revolvers they saw human forms.

"Surrender!" came in the commanding voice of young Diamond Dick.

"Wow! Surrender et is, er down goes your meat wagons!" Handsome Harry howled.

The collapsible torch of the boy acrobat flamed its light, illuminating the scene.

The two men, panic stricken, tried to regain their boat.

The sport sent the boat out into the stream with a kick of his foot and at the same instant threw himself on Congreve.

Handsome Harry jumped at Timberlake, and gripping him by the throat bore him backward.

"You don't surrenders short off, eh, when you're told?" he howled. "Then I takes pleasure in choking a bit o' sense into ye!"

Lucky Luke held up the torch, and by its light saw the quick victory of his friends over the surprised men.

Both Timberlake and Congreve fought to defend themselves, and fought to get away. It was a waste of strength and energy.

They were hurled to the earth, and there they were tied hard and fast.

Finding themselves helpless, the prisoners imitated Brennan, and tried bluff and bluster.

"Thet's all right, fellers," said Handsome Harry, with a grin. "Thar's a friend o' yours in ther house tryin' ther same! We'll bring him out and let you see him!"

"Give us the secret of the entrance from the shore here to the double wall of the cellar," the sport requested.

"We don't know what you're talking about," was the answer of Timberlake.

"Oh, I think you do! If we could go straight in from here it would save us the trouble of entering by the upper part of the house. We've got Brennan in there, and I want to go back to him."

Both Congreve and Timberlake insisted that they did not know what he was talking about, and declared that they were much misunderstood and abused men; and, like Brennan, they threatened all sorts of terrible things, not the least of which were damage suits.

Diamond Dick, Jr., simply laughed at them.

"We've got you in the toils, fellows; so there's no use to kick!"

A thorough examination of the house, using the knowledge now gained, revealed the peculiarities of its construction.

It was double walled on two sides, these double walls extending to and inclosing the cellar.

In each of these double walls were narrow stairways, which opened into the house through paneled doors set so cleverly in the walls that they could not be detected.

Each of these doors opened by means of a hidden spring.

From the double wall of the cellar there extended an underground gallery, which opened in a rock cleft at the water's edge, this cleft being so screened about that it was not to be detected easily, and could not be seen at all except from a canoe or boat.

But the surprising thing was the discovery that the haunted house held in these secret chambers a complete outfit for the manufacture of counterfeit money.

The three men—Brennan, Timberlake and Congreve—had conducted this counterfeiting establishment for a long time.

They spent very little, if any, of this counterfeit money in Quivaro, or in nearby cities. In distant cities they had confederates who, in many ways, put the money in circulation.

To more thoroughly guard their secret they had long ago begun the ghostly manifestations which had caused the house to be called haunted, and kept people at a distance.

Why they had not bought the house outright was not known, though it was supposed that they feared its possession as a piece of property by one of them might in some way attract undue attention and create suspicion.

They were brought into Quivaro, and there placed under arrest, charged with being counterfeiters.

But before the charge came to trial it was dropped, and the more serious charge of murder substituted, for in the meantime the body of Slocum was found in some reeds by the river.

Slocum had been killed by these men, and his body had been weighted and sunk in the river; but the weights had by and by dropped off, and the body had risen to the surface, where it was discovered and identified.

Timberlake, Brennan and Congreve did not escape.

They were not hanged, simply because the evidence of the murder of Slocum was circumstantial; but they were given long terms in the Arkansas penitentiary.

And so ends the story of the haunted house and of the "ghosts" of Quivaro.

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